

# **South Korean Politics and Rising “Anti-Americanism”: Implications for U.S. Policy Toward North Korea**

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## Summary

In December 2002, South Koreans elected Roh Moo-hyun, a little-known, self-educated lawyer, as their president. The left-of-center Roh narrowly defeated the conservative candidate, Lee Hoi Chang. Roh ran on a platform of reform, pledging to make South Korean politics more transparent and accountable, to make the economy more equitable, and to make South Korea a more equal partner in its alliance with the United States. During the campaign, Roh pledged to continue his predecessor, Kim Dae Jung's, "sunshine policy" of engaging North Korea, and harshly criticized the Bush Administration's approach to Pyongyang.

The 2002 election was notable for several inter-related reasons. First, it exposed the deep generational divide among South Koreans. Roh was favored by voters under the age of 45, who emerged during the election as an anti-status quo force. In contrast, Lee easily won the votes of those over 45. Second, Roh's victory was due in part to his criticisms of the United States, and he benefitted from the massive demonstrations in late 2002 protesting the acquittal of two U.S. servicemen who were operating a military vehicle when it killed two Korean schoolgirls. Third, the election and the anti-American demonstrations highlighted the growing influence and sophistication of Korean civil society groups, which now have a significant voice in determining policy outcomes in Seoul.

These shifts in the South Korean polity, particularly the rise in anti-Americanism, confront the Bush Administration with a policy dilemma: how to manage the U.S.-ROK alliance while pursuing a more confrontational approach toward North Korea than that favored by many, if not most, South Koreans.

Institutionally, the South Korean presidency has few checks on its power. While the unicameral National Assembly's influence has been slowly rising since South Korea became a democracy in 1987, it is hampered by formal and informal limitations on its power. The National Assembly is controlled by the opposition, right-of-center Grand National Party (GNP). The second-largest grouping is President Roh's party, the Millennium Democratic Party (MDP). Both major parties are under significant internal stress, and there is speculation that they will split and be reconstituted before the next quadrennial legislative election, to be held in April 2004.

This report will be updated periodically.

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## Overview

For most of the first four decades after the country was founded in 1948, South Korea was ruled by authoritarian governments. Ever since the mid-1980s, when widespread anti-government protests forced the country's military rulers to enact sweeping democratic reforms, democratic institutions and traditions have deepened in South Korea. In 1997, long-time dissident and opposition politician **Kim Dae Jung** (commonly referred to as "DJ") was elected to the presidency, the first time an opposition party had prevailed in a South Korean presidential election. By law, Korean presidents can only serve one five-year term. In December 2002, Kim was succeeded by a member of his party, **Roh** (pronounced "noh") **Moo-hyun**, a self-educated former human rights lawyer who emerged from relative obscurity to defeat establishment candidates in both the primary and general elections. Roh campaigned on a platform of reform — reform of Korean politics, economic policymaking, and U.S.-ROK relations — to narrowly defeat conservative candidate **Lee Hoi Chang** in the general election. Roh captured 48.9% of the vote to Lee's 46.6%.

Prior to assuming the Presidency, Roh's only previous government experience was an eight-month term as Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries in 2000 and 2001, and two stints as a lawmaker in the National Assembly, from 1988-1992 and 1998-2000. During the 1990s, Roh lost two legislative elections and one bid for the mayoralty of his hometown, Pusan. Ironically, during the presidential campaign, the circumstances surrounding these defeats contributed to Roh's image as a principled reformer.

**Noteworthy Aspects of the 2002 Presidential Election.** The 2002 election was notable for several inter-related reasons. First, it exposed the deep generational divide among South Koreans. Exit polls showed that nearly 60% of people in their 20s and 30s voted for Mr Roh, compared with less than 40% of people in their 50s and 60s. It is perhaps not coincidental that those supporting Lee directly experienced the Korean War (1950-53) and its immediate aftermath.

Roh, 56, himself represents a generational shift. Eleven years younger than Lee, he also is the first South Korean president who was not an established political figure when the country began to emerge from authoritarian rule in the late 1980s.

Second, Roh's victory was due in part to his call for South Korea to become a more "equal" partner in the U.S.-ROK alliance and to his criticism of U.S. policies on the Korean peninsula. Roh pledged to largely continue Kim Dae Jung's "sunshine

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policy” of engaging North Korea. Although these views resonated most strongly among younger generations of South Koreans, they have entered the mainstream of Korean society, as shown by the massive demonstrations in late 2002 protesting the acquittal of two U.S. servicemen who were operating a military vehicle when it killed two Korean schoolgirls.

Third, the election and the anti-American demonstrations highlighted the growing influence and sophistication of Korean civil society groups, which now have a significant voice in determining policy outcomes in Seoul. Many of these organizations garnered support for Roh during the election campaign and organized the anti-U.S. protests and the “Red Devil” rallies to cheer South Korea’s national team on to the semifinal during the 2002 Soccer World Cup. The groups’ goals and means — which tend to rely heavily upon networking through the Internet — have been particularly effective in encouraging younger Koreans to become politically active. Higher-than-expected turnout of younger voters benefitted Roh, as overall turnout in the 2002 election was a record low of 70%, compared with 80% in the 1997 election.

**A Country Divided.** The challenge facing Roh, who was inaugurated on February 25, 2003, is how to carry out his reform agenda despite the deep divisions in South Korea. The country is split not only generationally, but also regionally. The National Assembly is controlled by the opposition Grand National Party (GNP). And Roh’s own party, the Millennium Democratic Party (MDP) is also divided between his supporters and a large faction of party elders that nearly succeeded in ousting Roh as the MDP’s presidential candidate several weeks before the election.

Roh’s task will be complicated by the National Assembly elections scheduled to take place in April 2004. These are likely to exacerbate the zero-sum tendency in South Korean politics, in which ruling and opposition parties rarely cooperate. Furthermore, both the ruling MDP and opposition GNP are under significant internal stress, and there is speculation that there will be a major political realignment before the next legislative election.

## South Korea’s Political System

**A Weak Legislature.** Nominally, power in South Korea is shared by the President, who is elected to one five-year term, and the 273-member unicameral National Assembly. National Assembly members are elected to 4-year terms. Of these, 227 members represent single-member constituencies. The remaining 46 are “at large” members selected on the basis of proportional voting. As mentioned above, the next legislative elections will be held in April 2004.

Since the Assembly’s powers were enhanced in the 1987 constitution, it has at times altered the political climate by providing opposition parties with a forum to criticize, inspect, and attempt to embarrass the executive branch. Indeed, one of the Assembly’s major accomplishments since 1987 has been to institutionalize its oversight of the executive; executive branch officials regularly appear before committees, helping to make South Korean policy-making more transparent. Also,

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from time to time, opposition parties have used Assembly proceedings to successfully stymie presidential initiatives, usually by boycotting legislative sessions.

In reality, however, the President continues to be the dominant force in South Korean policymaking, as formal and informal limitations prevent the National Assembly from initiating major pieces of legislation. For instance, the Korean constitution grants the Assembly the power only to cut funds from the President's budget, not to propose any increases or alter the executive's budgetary allocations. (Article 57) Also, the Assembly must act on the budget not later than thirty days before the start of the new fiscal year on January 1. (Article 54)

South Korean legislators suffer from numerous other limitations. They have little in the way of legislative support agencies, and the typical Seoul legislative office is staffed by three salaried, full-time workers. Even the Prime Minister, who has little power, is nominated by the President. The fact that parties in the Assembly repeatedly have resorted to the brinkmanship tactic of the boycott reflects the legislative branch's weakness.

***Institution-Building by the National Assembly.*** Roh's election has accelerated moves by the opposition Grand National Party (GNP), which controls the National Assembly, to increase the National Assembly's resources through the creation of institutions modeled after the U.S. Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, and/or the General Accounting Office.

***The Assembly's Other Powers.*** A bill in the National Assembly may be introduced by members or by the executive branch. If passed, a bill is sent to the executive for presidential promulgation within 15 days. The President may veto the bill and send it back to the National Assembly for reconsideration. If the assembly overrides the veto with the concurrence of two-thirds or more of members present, the bill will become law. With respect to the judiciary, the consent of the National Assembly is also required for the presidential appointment of all Supreme Court justices. Also required is the ratification by the Assembly of treaties and agreements as well as international acts or conventions to which South Korea is a signatory. The declaration of war, the dispatch of troops abroad, or the stationing of foreign troops in South Korean territory requires the consent of the Assembly as well.

**Political Parties.** South Korean political parties form, disband, and merge regularly, in part because they tend to be regionally-based and centered around charismatic personalities rather than substantive issues. It is not uncommon for members of the National Assembly to jump from one party to another, a practice that has led to considerable disaffection among the South Korean electorate. During the 2002 presidential election, Roh Moo-hyun benefitted from his image of a principled

**South Korea's Major Political Parties, as of August 2002**  
(273 seats in the National Assembly.)

**GNP** — (Grand National Party, 153 seats) Victories in the August 2002 bi-elections gave the GNP its first majority in the National Assembly since 1997.

**MDP** — (Millennium Democratic Party, 101 seats) The party of President Roh Moo-hyun. Founded by former President Kim Dae Jung. The MDP controlled the National Assembly via an alliance with another party until September 2001.

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politician who had suffered personally because of his resolution not to participate in these political machinations. In 1990, Roh chose not to follow his mentor and long-time opposition leader, Kim Young Sam, into an alliance with the then-ruling party, a decision that contributed to Roh's defeats in the 1992 National Assembly election and the 1995 Pusan mayoralty election. In 1992, Kim won the presidential election.

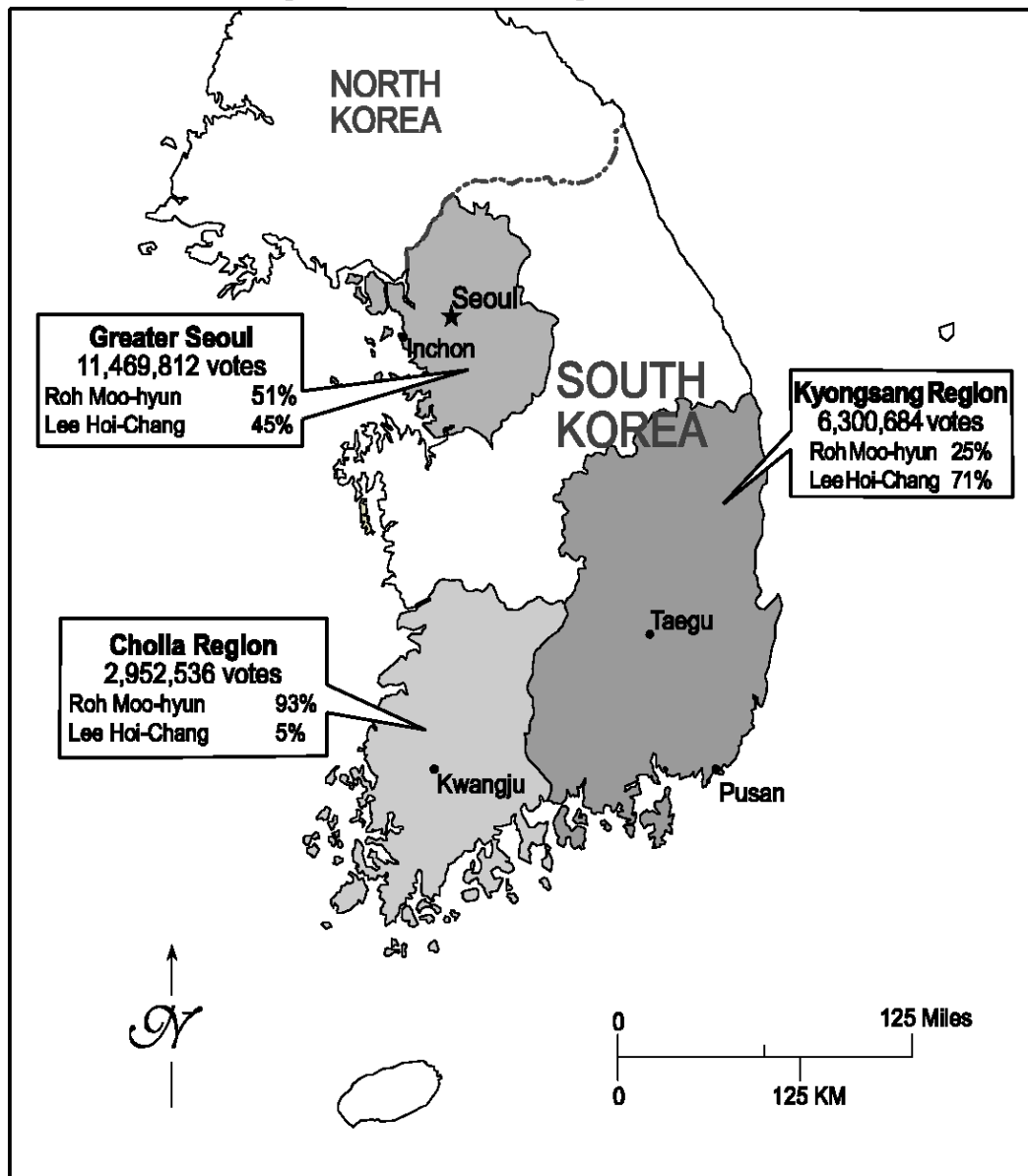
Presently, there are three major political parties in South Korea: President Roh Moo-hyun's center-left ruling Millennium Democratic Party (**MDP**, formerly the National Congress for New Politics), which has 101 seats in the National Assembly (137 seats constitutes a parliamentary majority); the generally conservative opposition Grand National Party (**GNP**), which at 153 seats has a majority in the Assembly; and the smaller (14 seats) conservative United Liberal Democrats (ULD), which is led by the veteran politician Kim Jong-pil and has declined dramatically in size and influence in recent years. In April 2003, the GNP further increased its majority by winning 2 of 3 bi-elections that were notable for a turnout of below 30%, the lowest in nearly 40 years.

There is speculation that there may be a major political realignment before the April 2004 National Assembly elections. The MDP and GNP both are undergoing unsettled times. The GNP, which suffered from defections early in the presidential campaign, is still recovering from Lee Hoi Chang's defeat. The divisions are even more acute in the MDP, where Roh's base of support within the ruling party is confined to a relatively small group of younger reformers. During the presidential election, the party's "establishment" figures favored another candidate who Roh defeated in the MDP's primaries — the country's first-ever — in the winter of 2002. Later in the presidential campaign, opposition to Roh inside the MDP grew to such an extent that several party leaders publicly talked of disbanding and forming a new party led by another candidate. Some political analysts speculate that Roh may seek to gather into a new party reformist politicians from the MDP, GNP, and smaller parties.

**Regionalism.** South Korean politics is highly regionalized. The MDP's base is in the southwestern Cholla region (also known as Honam), where Roh won 93% of the vote in the 2002 presidential election. (See Figure 2) In the last nation-wide National Assembly elections, held in April 2000, no GNP candidate won any of Cholla's 29 seats.

Conversely, GNP candidate Lee Hoi Chang won 71% of the vote in the southeastern Kyongsang region (also known as Yongnam), the GNP's stronghold. In the 2000 National Assembly elections, the GNP won 64 of the 65 constituencies in Kyongsang. Before Kim Dae Jung's victory in 1997, South Korea's military governments gave preferential treatment to the Kyongsang region, leading Cholla residents to accuse the government of discrimination. The greater Seoul area, which is the home of nearly half of the South Korean electorate, has emerged as the swing vote. There has been discussion of combating regionalism by adopting multiple-seat constituencies in the National Assembly.

Figure 1. Political Regionalism in South Korea



**Sources:** Map Resources adapted by CRS. (M.Chin 02/03) Voting results adapted from Seoul National Election Commission figures.

**Notes:** Just over 24.5 million South Koreans voted in the 2002 election. Greater Seoul is comprised of Seoul, Incheon, and Kyonggi Province. The Kyongsang region is comprised of North and South Kyongsang Provinces, Pusan, and Taegu. The Cholla region is comprised of North and South Cholla Provinces and Kwangju.

**Corruption.** Corruption appears to be institutionalized in political and economic life in South Korea. The country regularly receives poor marks on international indexes of bribe-taking and other forms of corruption, in part because the economy remains highly regulated compared to many other industrialized



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nations.<sup>1</sup> President Kim Dae Jung made fighting corruption a high priority when he was elected in 1997. However, in 2002, when his two younger sons were arrested on charges of influence peddling, Kim became the third successive Korean president to be tainted by major money-related scandals during his final months in office. Both sons were convicted, and one was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison. The scandals led Kim to resign from the MDP. Ironically, during his long years as an opposition politician, President Kim frequently had railed against the corruption and insularity of the ruling establishment. The former GNP opposition leader, Lee Hoi Chang, has also been tainted with corruption allegations of arranging for his son to avoid Korea's mandatory 26-month military service. President Roh has pledged to reduce corruption, particularly in the office of the prosecutor-general, which has been tainted by bribery scandals.

**NGOs.** Since the end of military rule, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have increased dramatically in South Korea, particularly in the past five years. The groups exist on both the local and national levels, range widely in size, and focus on a wide array of issues, including the environment, government and corporate corruption, disability rights, women's rights, crimes committed by U.S. forces in Korea, revising the U.S.-ROK Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), and returning land used by U.S. forces. Many international NGOs have set up local chapters in Seoul. In contrast to the student-led, class-based groups of the 1980s that spent much of their time organizing militant anti-government and anti-U.S. protests, an increasing number of NGOs have hiring permanent staff, fundraisers, and research offices.<sup>2</sup> As they have begun to professionalize their operations, they seem to have begun to have a greater impact on South Korean domestic and foreign policy.

South Korean NGOs have been particularly adept at forming loose, temporary coalitions with one another to organize large-scale protests on a particular issue. Many of the most successful examples of citizen activism in South Korea involved the formation of umbrella organizations that pool the resources of member groups. The country's rapid adoption of the Internet — South Korea has one of the world's highest rates of Internet usage — has facilitated such networking by enabling groups

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<sup>1</sup> Berlin-based Transparency International, for instance, gave South Korea a score of 4.5 on its 2002 corruption perception index, with "0" indicating "highly corrupt" and "10" representing "highly clean." The United States scored a 7.7. The index aggregates surveys of well-informed people with regard to the extent of corruption, defined as the misuse of public power for private benefit, and indicated by the frequency of corrupt payments, the value of bribes paid, and the resulting obstacle imposed on businesses. Additionally, South Korean companies scored a 3.9 — 18<sup>th</sup>-lowest of the world's 21 largest exporters — on Transparency International's bribe payers index, which measures perceptions of the likelihood that companies will pay bribes when they do business abroad. "0" indicates "high bribery" and "10" indicates "low bribery." U.S. companies scored a 5.3. Transparency International, *Global Corruption Report 2003*, p. 262-67; [<http://www.globalcorruptionreport.org>].

<sup>2</sup> Katharine Moon, "Korean Nationalism, Anti-Americanism, and Democratic Consolidation," in Samuel S. Kim, ed., *Korea's Democratization*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

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to quickly establish linkages, coordinate activities, and spread the word about protest activities.<sup>3</sup> The anti-American protests in 2002 were a case in point.

**Decentralization.** The growing influence of Korean civil society groups has been possible in part because of the growing decentralization of power in South Korea. In the early and mid-1990s, new laws were passed creating local assemblies and establishing popular election of local officials for the first time since the 1950s. Increased local autonomy has encouraged political consciousness and activism, as South Koreans have come to expect local and national elected leaders to be more responsive and accountable to their constituents.<sup>4</sup> Despite these changes, Seoul remains the locus of political power in South Korea, in part because local governments have little authority to impose their own taxes.<sup>5</sup> President Roh Moo-hyun has vowed to further decentralize political power giving more autonomy to the provinces and by transferring certain executive offices to locations outside of Seoul.

**South Korea's Media.** During the country's period of military rule, South Korea's media operated under tight censorship rules. Additionally, the government rewarded favorable coverage by exempting Korean newspapers from intrusive scrutiny into the companies' internal operations. In recent years, however, tensions between the government and South Korea's print media have surfaced, and appear to have worsened under the current Roh administration.

South Korea has nearly two dozen major newspaper and broadcast companies. Korea's three leading mainstream newspapers, the *Chosun Ilbo*, *Donga Ilbo*, and the *JoongAng Ilbo*, control about 70% of the market. All claim circulation figures of between 1.8 and 2.1 million and have right-of-center political leanings. The leading left-of-center daily, *Hankyoreh*, has an estimated readership of 400,000.<sup>6</sup> In recent years, many younger South Koreans have turned to internet news sources such as *OhMyNews*.

Most Korean newspapers are affiliates of and/or highly dependent on the advertising revenues from the country's *chaebol* conglomerates, giving many an allegedly predisposed hostility to the *chaebol* reforms pushed by former President Kim Dae Jung and continued by President Roh. Traditionally, mainstream newspapers have been opaque operations that have benefitted their corporate patronage. Circulation figures are not independently audited, journalists are known to accept pay-offs from companies and government agencies to supplement low wages, and for years newspapers were exempt from tax audits. The government

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<sup>3</sup> March and April 2003 correspondence with Katharine Moon, Jane Bishop Associate Professor of Political Science, Wellesley College, based on her November 2002 draft article, "Political Sociology of USFK-Korea Relations," p. 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> March and April 2003 with Katharine Moon, and Moon, "Political Sociology of USFK-Korea Relations," p.13-14.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Chamberlain, *Korea 2010. The Challenges of the New Millenium*, (Washington, DC: CSIS Press, 2001), p. 109-10.

<sup>6</sup> *New York Times*, "South Korea's Conservative Press Takes Heat From the Liberals," May 7, 2001.

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often has been reluctant to criticize the media because of fears that owners would retaliate by publishing embarrassing stories. Korean newspapers' political biases frequently are reflected in their news coverage, and articles often are based upon rumors or hearsay rather than actual evidence.<sup>7</sup>

In 2001, President Kim Dae Jung launched a highly public tax probe of the country's leading dailies that was criticized for targeting those papers that were most critical of the government. During the 2002 campaign, President Roh frequently complained about a "conservative" bias in the press and made greater openness in the media an element of his reform platform. Since his inauguration, Roh has acted to contain "unfair" ways newspapers "distort" government policies by replacing restrictive press clubs with open press briefings and by requiring government agencies to prepare daily summaries that classify newspaper articles into one of five categories: "positive, straight and simple, constructive criticism, malicious criticism, and error." The reports are then to be sent to the Blue House, the President's office. Criticism over these moves contributed to the resignation of Roh's appointee as president of the state-run Korean Broadcasting System (KBS). Roh has also moved to grant greater access to Korea's internet publications that are widely used by younger readers and many of which backed Roh during the election campaign.<sup>8</sup>

## Current Political Situation and Analysis

Roh Moo-hyun won the South Korean Presidency by adopting a mantle of reform, one that covers three areas: Korea's relations with the United States, Korea's economic policy, and Korean politics. Additionally, Roh has pledged to continue the essence of Kim Dae Jung's sunshine policy toward North Korea, which he has renamed the "peace and prosperity" policy.

**"Anti-Americanism".** Anti-American sentiments have long been present in South Korean society, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s. After the end of military rule they were largely confined to highly ideological groups, particularly student organizations, that generally operated on the political margins in Korea. In the late 1990s, however, criticisms of United States policy moved into the mainstream, a move that also has made anti-Americanism less ideological and more issue-specific. The criticisms range widely and include accusations that the Bush Administration is not listening to South Koreans in general, that the Bush Administration is blocking rapprochement between North and South Korea, that U.S. forces in South Korea are not sufficiently accountable for crimes they commit in South Korea, that the United States is covering up alleged atrocities committed during the Korean War, and that the South Korean government too often caters to

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<sup>7</sup> *Financial Times 2001 Survey of South Korea*, "Tax Probes: Clean-up or a Charter for Censorship?" October 24, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> *The Economist 2003 Survey of South Korea*, "South Korea's Press: A Question of Distortion," April 17, 2003; *Chungang Ilbo* (English Internet Version), "ROK Plan for 'Daily Summaries,'" April 11, 2003; *Asian Wall Street Journal*, "No Sunshine for South Korea's Media," March 20, 2003.

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U.S. interests.<sup>9</sup> Underlying these sentiments is the declining sense of threat that South Koreans feel from North Korea. This trend was evident in the late 1990s, and has deepened since the North-South Korean summit in June 2000.<sup>10</sup> Two events in 2002 caused the critiques to coalesce into massive anti-U.S. demonstrations: President Bush's inclusion of North Korea in his "axis of evil" countries, and the June 2002 killing of two Korean schoolgirls by a U.S. military vehicle.

Critics of the United States tend to be younger than 50, and appear to fall into three broad groups: 1) radical leftists, many of whom ideologically reject the U.S.-ROK alliance and some of whom support North Korea; 2) nationalists, who resent perceived intrusions into South Korea's sovereignty by the United States (most prominently, the U.S.-South Korea status of forces agreement) but who do not necessarily oppose the alliance *per se*; and 3) individuals who support the alliance but oppose U.S. policy on specific issues, such as alleged crimes committed by U.S. servicemen. This latter group appears to be in the majority among current anti-American activists.<sup>11</sup> Some analysts have pointed out that a failure to address the concerns of the latter group could exacerbate the problem by causing these individuals' concerns to morph into a nationalistic or ideological-based opposition to the U.S.-South Korean alliance.

Opinion polls taken over the past few years generally have found that large majorities of respondents favor a partial or total withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea, though most holding this position say they favor a drawdown unless there are improvements in North-South Korean relations; few favor an outright withdrawal. The Bush Administration's initiatives to act upon longstanding, but never enacted, plans to reduce or redeploy U.S. forces, including an April 2003 pledge to move from the Yongsan base in Seoul, appear to have calmed the anti-base movement somewhat. The Roh government has asked the U.S. not to undertake these moves until the nuclear issue with North Korea is settled.

**Relations with the United States under Roh.** During the presidential campaign, Roh tapped into anti-American sentiments in several ways. He criticized the Bush Administration for not negotiating with North Korea. He called for "modernizing" the U.S.-ROK alliance to make South Korea a more equal partner in the relationship. He demanded a renegotiation of the U.S.-South Korea Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). And, Roh bucked South Korean tradition by not traveling to the United States during the campaign. Indeed, Roh's May 14, 2003 summit with President Bush in Washington, DC will be his first trip to the United States. In the late 1980s, Roh called for a complete withdrawal of U.S. forces after

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<sup>9</sup> For a useful survey of the attitudes of more than 50 young (30-49 years-old) Korean leaders, see William Watts, *Next Generation Leaders in the Republic of Korea: Opinion Survey Report and Analysis*, April 2002. Available at [<http://www.keia.com/otherPapers.htm>].

<sup>10</sup> For pre-summit evidence of this trend, see Norman Levin, *The Shape of Korea's Future. South Korean Attitudes Toward Unification and Long-Term Security Issues*, (RAND: Santa Monica, CA, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Moon, "Korean Nationalism, Anti-Americanism, and Democratic Consolidation," p. 137.

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a hoped-for reunification with the North, a stance he backed away from during the campaign.

Since winning the election, Roh has sought to reduce bilateral tensions by moderating the tone of many his statements regarding U.S.-South Korean relations. Additionally, in March, he risked alienating many of his supporters by publicly supporting the U.S.-led war against Iraq and promising to send 700 engineering and medical troops to Iraq. Polls show that about 80% of South Koreans opposed the invasion of Iraq. While Roh has expressed reservations about the war, he has justified the move as necessary to maintain South Korea's ability to influence U.S. policy toward North Korea. The move prompted large anti-war demonstrations in South Korea, leading the South Korean National Assembly to delay a vote on the deployment three times. In response, Roh appeared before the National Assembly — a rare event in South Korea — to personally appeal for the measure. The deployment was approved on April 2, 2003, thanks to support from the opposition GNP, which has long supported close alliance relations with the United States.

**Relations with North Korea.** Underlying the wave of America bashing in South Korea is the declining sense of threat most South Koreans feel from North Korea. During the presidential campaign, Roh called for a continuation of Kim Dae Jung's sunshine policy of engaging North Korea, albeit under a different name and with broader domestic support. He frequently stated that "South and North Korea are the two main actors in inter-Korean relations." Additionally, he often criticized the Bush Administration's refusal to negotiate with Pyongyang, and on the eve of the election stated that South Korea should try to play the role of a semi-neutral mediator over the nuclear dispute between the two countries.

Roh has called for the North to dismantle its nuclear weapons program, though he has opposed the Bush Administration's desire to use economic sanctions to achieve this end. Instead, he has called for a peaceful resolution of the problem through dialogue.

In his inaugural address, Roh put forth the vague outlines for a "policy of peace and prosperity" on the Korean Peninsula, one that he said will include a greater transparency than was true of the sunshine policy. This last item was a reference to \$500 million in secret payments the Hyundai corporation made to North Korea shortly before the historic North-South Korean summit in June 2000. In March 2003, Roh announced he would not oppose the formation of an independent prosecutor to investigate charges that the Kim Dae Jung administration reimbursed Hyundai for much of the payments. The prosecutor's office reportedly began its probe in April 2003.

Although some in Washington, DC, viewed Roh's main opponent, Lee Hoi Chang, as a staunch critic of the sunshine policy, others believed that if elected, Lee would not have ushered in a wholesale change in South Korea's policy toward the North. Though Lee called for a greater "reciprocity" in North-South relations, the main thrust of his criticisms were about implementation rather than overall direction. Lee proposed that further South Korean aid should be made conditional upon reductions in the North's military threat, a linkage that the Kim government did not make, and that the Roh government has only implied without making explicit. Lee

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also said that no new aid should be provided until North Korea dismantles its nuclear weapons program.

**Economic Policy.** President Roh has stated that market-oriented reforms are a key to achieving his goal of turning South Korea into “an international logistics and financial hub in Northeast Asia.” During the campaign, Roh pledged to continue Kim Dae Jung’s economic reforms, to force Korea’s huge conglomerates (*chaebol*) to become more transparent and to redress Korea’s income gap, which has widened since the country’s 1997 financial crisis. Since his inauguration in February, Roh has pushed his *chaebol* reforms aggressively. His government has encouraged the investigation and prosecution of fraudulent accounting of SK Global, the trading arm of the third-largest *chaebol*, SK. His administration also is discussing proposals to induce the *chaebol* to form holding companies that would reduce the power of the founding families who currently dominate many conglomerates and reduce the practice of cross-shareholding among individual companies within each conglomerate. Although some *chaebol* leaders have adopted these practices on their own, others have stated their opposition to the government’s proposals.

Roh’s ability to push through his reforms is expected to be made more difficult by the country’s current economic slowdown. The Bank of Korea recently revised its economic growth forecast for 2003 from 5.7% to 4.1%, due to rising tensions with North Korea, rising oil prices, declining exports, the repercussions of the SK Global scandal, and a slump in consumer confidence. Additionally, pursuing economic reforms aggressively could require Roh to take steps that could antagonize South Korean organized labor, which is one of the few big and coherent interest groups with which Roh has close ties.<sup>12</sup>

**Political Reforms.** By allowing the National Assembly to appoint a prosecutor to investigate Hyundai’s secret payments to North Korea, Roh was seeking to fulfill three campaign goals: make North-South relations more transparent, reduce corruption, and increase cooperation with the opposition GNP. Tactical, bipartisan alliances on individual issues is a rarity in South Korea, where politics tend to have a zero-sum quality. The GNP’s control of the legislature, a situation that Kim Dae Jung did not face until the GNP took control in his third year in office, makes it imperative that Roh periodically work with the opposition. However, such political pragmatism risks alienating his base in the MDP. The fast-looming National Assembly elections, to be held in April 2004, are likely to reduce the likelihood of Roh and the GNP cooperating.

## Implications for the United States

### The U.S.-ROK Alliance Cannot be Taken for Granted

The deepening of democracy and related support for populist and nationalistic policies in South Korea is likely to make U.S.-ROK alliance relations more difficult

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<sup>12</sup> Brian Barry, “Survey: South Korea. A Democratic Riddle,” *The Economist*, April 17, 2003.



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to manage and reduces U.S. options in dealing with North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.

A policy of confronting Pyongyang — for instance, by asking for the United Nations to impose sanctions — almost certainly would require at least the tacit cooperation of Seoul to be successful. A preemptive attack on North Korea's known nuclear facilities, as was contemplated by the Clinton Administration in 1994, would likely be strongly opposed by the Roh government and the South Korean people. The recent surge in anti-American sentiment also mean that a failure to obtain South Korea's cooperation could lead to a serious strain, if not a rupture, in the fifty year old U.S.-ROK alliance. Yet suspicions of the Bush Administration's policy toward North Korea among many South Koreans arguably will make it politically costly for President Roh to support a more confrontational approach if the United States decides to pursue this course, particularly during a year when Roh's party is trying to capture the National Assembly.

On the other hand, Roh's election could present the Bush Administration with an opportunity. If Roh is persuaded to follow the United States' lead, his outspoken advocacy of engaging North Korea may position him to sell a more aggressive North Korea policy to the South Korean public, which remains divided about how best to deal with North Korea. As recently as the summer of 2002 — before the anti-American protests grew in size — domestic disenchantment with Kim Dae Jung's sunshine policy appeared sufficiently strong that Roh began to distance himself from the approach.

## **Anti-American Sentiment Is Likely to Continue**

NGO activity in South Korea tends to have an exaggerated peak-and-valley nature that appears to be a direct result of what one U.S. scholar of Korean politics has called a "loose, coalition style of civic activism." Typically, a high-profile event results in a few groups taking the lead in putting together a coalition of disparate NGOs, resulting in large-scale protests. As issues lose steam, the activism fades dramatically because each member organization has its own agendas that may have nothing to do with the anti-American issue at hand.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, although the recent anti-American demonstrations have largely vanished from South Korea's streets, this does not necessarily mean that anti-American sentiments have died down. It may only mean that the feelings are lying dormant until either another event triggers a further round of protests or the fundamental issues of concern are addressed. The recent announcements by the U.S. Department of Defense that it plans to realign the structure of U.S. forces in South Korea may represent a fundamental change that could address some of the concerns that have generated anti-American attitudes.

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<sup>13</sup> March and April 2003 correspondence with Katherine Moon; Moon, "Political Sociology of USFK-Korea Relations," p.8-9.

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## A Need for Greater Public Outreach?

Roh Moo-hyun's election demonstrated the degree to which Korean non-governmental organizations now are able to influence South Korean politics and policy. This development places constraints upon the Seoul government, which is under pressure from its own citizens to be more accountable and transparent than ever before. In turn, this perhaps points to a need for U.S. public diplomacy to focus on reaching out to Korean interest groups and new online news sources. At one time, particularly at the height of anti-American activity in the 1980s, the United States had a large public affairs presence across South Korea. However, all of the USIS centers in South Korea have been permanently closed for security reasons, replaced by Internet libraries and increased public affairs staff in Seoul. Additionally, there are few if any cultural exchanges conducted with South Korea.

For decades, South Korea foreign policy was dominated by a set of elites who generally came from the same region, attended the same schools and universities, and tended to have a similar world-view that revolved around maintaining a strong U.S.-ROK alliance. This monopoly on power was broken somewhat in the 1997 election of former opposition leader Kim Dae Jung. Roh's election demonstrated that the South Korean polity has shifted further, bringing to power a new set of individuals who — like Roh himself — on the whole are younger, did not necessarily attend elite schools, and are more apt to criticize the United States, particularly on matters relating to North Korea and to the U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula. Indeed, many of these individuals have complained in the past that they have been ignored by the United States, raising the point that perhaps the U.S. government should make more concerted efforts to reach out to these groups, which often do not rely upon the mainstream media for news and analysis. For their part, many U.S. policymakers are worried that the number of defenders of the United States is decreasing, outside of the conservative South Korean elite.

As reported out of the House International Relations Committee on May 8, 2003, the House version of The Foreign Relations Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 2004 and 2005 (H.R. 1950), contains four sections directed at U.S. public diplomacy in Korea, including sections that: a) would create a new, \$750,000 per year program of summer institutes in the U.S. for Korean students; b) would increase funding for the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Program in Korea, which sends United States citizens to serve as English language teaching assistants at Korean colleges and high schools; c) convey the sense of the Congress that the U.S.-Korea Fulbright program should try to expand beyond traditional Korean elites and elite institutions; and d) convey the sense of the Congress that the Secretary of State should try to establish a diplomatic presence in the city of Pusan.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Respectively, these provisions are contained in sections 112(b)(3)(C), Sec. 112(b)(4)(G), 225, and 255 of H.R. 1950, as reported by the House International Relations Committee on May 8, 2003.



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